

In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai

Volume: III, Issue: 1



January - February, 2006

Get in Touch

Main Web link:

http://chennai.usconsulate.gov <u>Other links:</u>

http://americanlibrary.in.library.net http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov http://www.usaep.org http://buyusa.gov/india

Consulate Phone Number:

044-2811-2000

Consulate Fax Number: 044-2811-2020

Upcoming Films:

American Westerns

(a festival of American Western films)

January 23

Rio Bravo (1959)

January 24

Cheyanne Autumn (1964)

January 25

The Left Handed Gun (1958)

January 26

Red River (1948)

January 27

The Magnificent Seven (1960)

January 28 *Unforgiven*

Unforgi (1992)



Crime Doesn't Pay (Bi-weekly Friday Films)

February 3
The Fugitive (1993)
February 17
North By Northwest (1959)

All Films at 6:30p.m. at Film Chamber Theater Gemini Circle Chennai - 6

Seats on a first come first served basis Co-sponsored by The Madras Film Society

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS IN 2006

Can it get any better?

2005 will be tough to beat when it comes to the U.S.relationship, indications are that 2006 will be better yet. In 2006 we will build upon Prime Minister Singh's successful trip to Washington last July, and the commitments flurry of announced at the time. That visit saw the Prime Minister and President Bush issue a Joint Statement outlining their resolve to work together in numerous ways.



http://chennai.usconsulate.gov

CG David T. Hopper lights a symbolic candle as part of a local World AIDS Day event. Photo used by permission. © "The Hindu"

Some examples: **The US-India Trade Policy Forum** is already up and running. Likewise, the **CEO Forum**, which seeks to identify ways for our governments to build confidence and remove barriers to trade—which continues to grow at a rapid pace. The **Economic Dialog** is yet another framework under which we are intensifying our interactions across five tracks: financial, trade, commerce, energy, and environment. **The July 18 Civil Nuclear Agreement** will benefit India and the international community. **The U.S.-India Defense Framework Agreement** also acknowledges that the two countries have entered a new era and will lead to more and greater collaboration. Finally, an important element of the new transformed U.S.-India relationship is enhanced commercial activity in high technology areas; the **High Technology Cooperation Group** provides a forum to continue to build from.

India continues to lead the world, with more than 80,000 Indian students studying in the U.S., and more and more American students are considering taking courses in India as well. India is also one of five high priority countries under the President's HIV Initiative. In 2005, the U.S. provided \$30 million towards AIDS control in India. And, in times of disaster, both countries responded. USAID disbursed over \$18 million to NGO partners for tsunami relief and rehabilitation, while, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, India was quick to respond with offers of relief that the U.S. gratefully accepted.

The trajectory for 2006 is clearly up and up and up.-Christopher Wurst, Editor, In Touch.



Year's end is a time for reflection. For an American in south India, such thoughts quickly turn to two natural disasters – the December 26 Indian Ocean tsunami that had such a tragic impact, and Hurricane Katrina which struck New Orleans and surrounding areas in the U.S. with such devastating force. The victims of those events certainly remain in our thoughts. As terrible as those and other events were, the challenges they brought also brought out the best in human nature. As mentioned

elsewhere in this edition, the U.S. government, NGOs and individual Americans generously came to the aid of tsunami victims. Similarly, Americans will never forget the way in which Indians and others helped us in our time of need after Hurricane Katrina.

This is also a time for looking forward. 2006 should be a banner year in Indo-U.S. relations as we build upon the milestones of the July 18 agreements and work towards deepened relations across a broad swath of areas. I hope and trust 2006 holds many good things in store for our countries as well as for you, our readers and your families. Happy New Year.

USAID IN 2005: OVER \$18 MILLION GIVEN FOR TSUNAMI RELIEF

In the immediate aftermath of the devastating tsunami, and throughout the year that followed, USAID has been actively

involved supporting survivors in India and other affected countries. In India. programs supported by USAID provide humane and dignified temporary shelter families to who lost their homes returning and to workers to their livelihoods. A big part of the USAID efforts is to help children and youth recover, through educational and recreation programs (see photo at right).

Through USAID, the U.S. Government has

worked continuously over the past year in Tamil Nadu with a network of local NGO partners and in close cooperation with local government officials and communities. USAID is targeting six coastal districts in Tamil Nadu to improve disaster preparedness, and is working through the

"CityLinks" program to link Cuddalore and Nagapattinam with cities in Florida to learn and observe at the municipal level.

During the relief phase, immediately following the tsunami,

USAID distributed \$4 million **NGOs** to focused on water and sanitation, solid waste management, education, psycho-social support, and restoring livelihoods. Since then, during the extended transition and recovery phase, USAID provided \$14 million in funding to address needs related to the extended time frame of the temporary shelter communities, continued to work with NGO partners focusing on water and sanitation, preparing shelters for the hot summer and the Northeast Monsoon.

Participants in a USAID-funded Karate program gather at the beach in Cuddalore.

and working with women and children. USAID, with the strong support of local governments here and able-bodied NGOs, will be working on these projects through September 2007.



CONSULATE CHENNAI PARTICIPATES IN TWO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS

December is a huge month for movie lovers in south India. The renowned International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), in Thiruvananthapuram, and the burgeoning Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF) showed over 200 films

between them, covering over 100 countries worldwide.
Consulate
Chennai hosted American documentary filmmaker Aviva Kempner, who screened a film



in both cities. Ms. Kempner also participated in a "Script-to-Screen" seminar at IFFK, and a public forum at CIFF, in addition to meeting with students at director Harihanan's LV Prasad filmmaking academy in Chennai.

At IFFK, India's brightest filmmakers, including Adoor Gopalkrishnan, Ketan Mehta, Shaji Karun, Deepa Mehta and Dr. Jabbar Patel rubbed shoulders with Ms. Kempner and a



Aviva Kempner and Margarathe von Trotta

host of foreign movie makers, such as Margarathe von Trotta and Poland's Krzysztof Krauze at a reception hosted by the U.S. Consulate. Consul General David Hopper helped

inaugurate CIFF, and later hosted a dinner at his home. Kamal Haasan and Gauthami were there, as were directors Dr. S. Krishnaswamy and Vasanth. Ms. Kempner delighted in comparing notes with Indian documentary filmmakers, and left with several ideas for future collaborations. The Consulate hopes to continue to participate in these premiere Indian cinema events.

CONSULAR CORNER: PROTECTING THE WELFARE OF INDIAN H-1B BENEFICIARIES

Every year, India sends more H-1B workers to the U.S. than any other country, and the U.S. Consulate General -- Chennai processes more H-1B applications than Mumbai, Kolkatta, and New Delhi combined. On one side of the debate, many American and Indian businesses claim U.S. work visa programs supply specialized technical knowledge that is in increasingly short supply in the United States. On the other side, critics claim tech workers from India are willing to accept lower salaries than their U.S. counterparts and end up taking jobs from U.S. workers.

Chennai plays no policy role in this debate. Consular officers simply adjudicate applications for H-1B visas based on the relevant regulations and the specific facts of each case. While most petitioning companies in the United States pay the salary agreed to in the H-1B petition as required by law, the Consulate has also noticed over the past year that some petitioners do not pay the required wage, and sometimes bring beneficiaries to the United States before securing an actual position. In order to protect the welfare of its Indian H-1B beneficiaries, the Consulate has been making and will continue to make every effort to verify the existence of qualifying employment offered by petitioners in the United States.

For example, some petitioners may bring a qualified beneficiary to the United States, and then send the beneficiary on a series of interviews with the petitioner's clients to secure an actual position. The Consulate has found that, often in these cases, the petitioner may not pay the beneficiary the required wage until the position with the client has been secured, resulting in a destitute Indian beneficiary. As a result, the Consulate works with H-1B petitioners to clearly identify the work locations and specific projects awaiting their Indian beneficiaries in the United States.

For more information on U.S. work visas, please visit the U.S. Consulate General -- Chennai website at http://chennai.usconsulate.gov/work_visas_h_l.html.

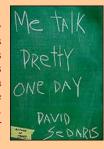
-David Feldmann, Vice Consul.

What We're Reading...

Lubna Khan Vice Consul:

Me Talk Pretty One Day by David Sedaris (2001)

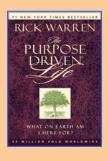
It is one of several nakedly honest, outrageous memoirs by Sedaris. In this autobiography, Sedaris talks about growing up with a speech impediment and the toils of trying to get rid of it. The best part is that he never did



Marsha Thomas
Office Management
Specialist:

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren (2001)

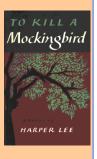
This book is about Christians learning what their purpose in life is and how to go about accomplishing that purpose. I've learned from this book that our purpose is to worship and serve GOD and we should work at it faithfully 24 hours a day



Seethalakshmi USEFI Regional Officer:

To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1961)

The novel is set in the 1930s in Maycomb, Alabama. It is the story, told through the eyes of a six-year old, about her father, Atticus, a lawyer who strives to prove the innocence of Tom Robinson, a falsely accused black man. It won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize.



Q & A with Vice Consul Saad Bokhari

(Note: Saad is a Vice Consul in the Consular section.)

CW: How did you decide to join the Foreign Service?

SB: Joining the Foreign Service (FS) allowed me to experience something new and exciting. Before this I was a high school teacher. Teaching allowed me to read about history, but the FS provides me an opportunity to make it.

CW: Can you describe your parents' backgrounds?

SB: Both my parents are part of the South Asian diaspora. My mother is originally from Pakistan and my father is from South India. Both my parents came to the US nearly forty years ago, as part of the first South Asian professional, educated class that immigrated to the US after the changes in

the immigration laws. They came to the US for better economic and professional opportunities. Living America has been wonderful experience for them. America is multiethnic society. Thev did feel South Asian "withdrawel" during their first few years in America, missing the subtle, yet important things that make

South Asian culture unique. There were no Indian restaurants which meant no going out for dosas, samosas, biriyani, or chaat masala. No mushairas (Urdu poety recitals) or Bharatnatyam dances. There were less than 100 Indian and Pakistanis in the entire state of Colorado during their first few years there. They love American football and Neil Diamond. They enjoy Indian and Pakistani Independence day activities just as much as the fireworks on the Fourth of July.

CW: What memories do you have growing up amongst two distinct cultures?

SB: I lived in two worlds, one South Asian and one American. I had close friends from each group and seldom did they ever intersect. I had to negotiate my own sense of space and identity. From kindergarten to high school, I was the only student of South Asian descent at my school. I would often have to clarify my identity to other Americans. Very few had met an actual Indian or Pakistani. My Urdu/Hindi language skills were almost non-existent. I could not understand Bollywood films or music. To this day, I've only watched about a dozen or so in my life. This doesn't mean life was boring. Having two distinct cultures meant that life was one big "masala." I could take the best of both worlds and create my own memories.

CW: How did your religion affect people behavior towards you in America?

SB: Until recently, Islam has always been the "mysterious unknown" religion in America. Americans tend to forget that Islam has been in America since the early 1600's. There is a renewed interest in early Islam and the African-American history in the US. After September 11th, I learned that many Americans lack a thorough understanding of Islam, but they have a genuine interest about the religion. Many had questions about Islam and I was happy to offer them my insights on the faith. It is worth noting that I have never felt threatened or discriminated against because I am a Muslim. America provides more freedom to practice Islam than most Muslim countries. In America, Islam doesn't have

the cultural baggage that often taints beliefs.

CW: What misperceptions do you think people have about Muslims in America?

SB: I think people have this perception that Muslims in America are regularly attacked (physically or psychologically) for their religious convictions. This is

simply not the case. Yes, hate crimes against Muslims in America do happen. But it does not happen to the extent that people think. I feel safe as a practicing Muslim in the United States. Muslims in America are very diverse. Walk into any mosque or Muslim community center and you will see the faces of the world. Nearly half of Muslims in the US are African American. Twenty-five percent are of South Asian background. Another 25% are Arab-American. Islam is the fastest growing religion in America, primarily through conversion...not immigration as most people think.

CW: Had you always wanted to work in India? What have been your biggest surprises since coming?

SB: India was my top choice. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, I had never left Colorado. Coming to India allowed me to go all around the world, but remain in a somewhat familiar setting. The food is familiar and I can understand the language. The new relationship between the US and India make this an exciting place to work.

India is on the cusp of something big. It has changed so much over the years. Big things are awaiting!